

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI  
Jackson Division

MISSISSIPPI ASSOCIATION OF  
EDUCATORS, BARBARA PHILLIPS,  
JAMES THOMAS, DAWN ZIMMERER,  
L.E. JIBOL, UNITED CAMPUS  
WORKERS SOUTHEAST LOCAL 3821,  
MADISYN DONLEY, ALEXIS COBBS,  
KAREN ADERER, FOSTERING  
LGBTQ+ ADVOCACY, RESOURCES,  
ENVIRONMENTS AND WOMEN IN  
SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING,

*Plaintiffs,*  
v.

Civil No. 3:25-cv-417-HTW-LGI

BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF STATE  
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER  
LEARNING, MISSISSIPPI COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE BOARD, MISSISSIPPI STATE  
BOARD OF EDUCATION, MISSISSIPPI  
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZER  
BOARD,

*Defendants.*

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DECLARATION OF JAMES M. THOMAS

I, JAMES M. THOMAS, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, declare as follows:

1. I am over the age of eighteen and competent to make this declaration. I submit this declaration based on my personal knowledge.
2. I am a Professor of Sociology at the University of Mississippi. In my role as professor I regularly teach courses that deal with the historical, social, economic, and political causes and consequences of racism, sexism, colonialism, and economic exploitation that affect us all, and have disparate impacts upon members of certain groups including but not limited to: racial and ethnic minorities, women, sexual minorities, and immigrants including those who are undocumented.
3. Integral to my teaching are lectures, discussions, and other material dealing directly with sociological research and writings on race, racism, gender discrimination,

xenophobia, and structural and systemic inequalities. These topics are core to the discipline of sociology and the social sciences more generally; and integral to fulfilling the mission of a liberal arts education which includes but is not limited to promoting human freedom and democracy; empowering individuals and preparing them for a complex and diverse world; developing among students a sense of social responsibility; and preparing them for a meaningful life.<sup>1</sup>

4. My students' success depends upon their freedom to question, discuss, and ultimately understand the historical, political, economic, and social forces that produce, maintain, and contest various social problems including but not limited to racism, sexism, colonialism, and economic exploitation. My classes, like that of most of my colleagues at the University of Mississippi, are incredibly diverse with respect to my students' socioeconomic backgrounds, their racial and ethnic statuses, and their gender. Among the first things I ask my students to do in my Introduction to Sociology (Sociology 101) course is to reflect upon whether if any aspect of their social status – race, ethnicity, gender, class position, or citizenship status – were different how that might have affected their life chances and opportunities, including the opportunity to study at the University of Mississippi. We discuss openly how and why these social statuses matter, and matter differently, for different groups of people. These discussions, and many others that take place in my classroom, are vital for students to develop an awareness of their social worlds, including the role they play in shaping those worlds.

5. Mississippi's recently enacted anti-DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) legislation threatens my ability to fulfill my duties and responsibilities as a sociologist, professor, and educator. The law's confusing yet sweeping language calls into question my standard course materials and classroom discussions, and leaves me open to possible discipline, censure, or other professional consequences simply for doing the job I was hired for, and for which I am professionally obligated to do. I will be impacted by sections 3(b), 3(i), 3(f), and 3(g) of HB 1193. Under this law, I do not believe I can continue to teach sociology without violating the law. The law demands that I censor not only my viewpoints, but those of my students. The law prohibits me from speaking openly and honestly with my students, which is central to creating and maintaining a respectful and robust intellectual environment for all students, no matter their backgrounds or ideological commitments.

6. I am joined in these concerns by many, if not most, of my colleagues at the University of Mississippi who have expressed their worries in public and in private over what they can and cannot say under this new law. Many of us worry that this law prohibits us from discussing such topics like chattel slavery, the genocide of indigenous people,

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<sup>1</sup> See "What is Liberal Education?", from the American Association of Colleges & Universities, <https://www.aacu.org/trending-topics/what-is-liberal-education>

Reconstruction, Jim Crow, women's rights, discrimination against LGBTQ+ persons, and much more.

7. Summer classes are underway at the University of Mississippi. The fall semester begins in August. My colleagues and I are already preparing our reading lists, lesson plans, and course syllabi for the upcoming academic year. The enforcement of HB 1193 will necessitate substantial changes to many courses for which students are already registered. The issuance of an injunction would provide much needed relief to students, faculty, and administration as the University grapples with the vagueness and sweeping reach of this new law.

8. As an educator, I am committed to the bedrock principle of academic freedom. True academic freedom requires classroom discussion that is open, honest, and intellectually rigorous. This legislation chills our speech and that of our students, and as a result threatens the openness and intellectual vibrancy of our classroom spaces. Under this new law, our students will receive a lesser quality education than before, and this will severely and negatively affect their chances and opportunities for success as graduates.

9. The University of Mississippi is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).<sup>2</sup> SACSCOC accrediting standards include providing educational programs that “(a) embody a coherent course of study, (b) are compatible with the stated mission and goals of the institution, and (c) are based upon fields of study appropriate to higher education”;<sup>3</sup> and that the institution “requires a general education component at the undergraduate level that...(c) ensures breadth of knowledge.”<sup>4</sup> Sociology is a standard discipline within the liberal arts tradition, and central to fulfilling the stated mission of the College of Liberal Arts and the University of Mississippi more broadly precisely because it ensures students leave our university as graduates with a breadth and depth of knowledge necessary for succeeding as responsible citizens in our democracy. HB 1193 will prevent our university from complying with its current accreditation standards, and this will negatively affect the standing of our institution and limit the chances and opportunities of our graduates.

10. I am steadfast in my commitment to my students, to my discipline, and to the mission of the University of Mississippi and its College of Liberal Arts. However, the ambiguity of HB 1193, as well as the possible disciplinary consequences contained within it, place me at significant legal, professional, and even personal risk for simply doing my job, a job I have done successfully for the past thirteen years.

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<sup>2</sup> See

[https://sacscoc.org/institutions/?state=MS&results\\_per\\_page=25&curpage=2&status=Accredited%2CCand idate](https://sacscoc.org/institutions/?state=MS&results_per_page=25&curpage=2&status=Accredited%2CCand idate)

<sup>3</sup> See <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2024/01/2024PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://sacscoc.org/app/uploads/2024/01/2024PrinciplesOfAccreditation.pdf>

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on this 16 day of June, 2025, in Oxford, Mississippi.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James M. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "J" and "T".

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James M. Thomas  
Professor of Sociology  
Sociology Graduate Program Director  
Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
University of Mississippi